

**The Commission on the Status of Women**  
**An Analysis: Agreed Conclusions on the Elimination of all Forms of**  
**Discrimination and Violence against the Girl Child**

Over the course of two long weeks of input, discussion, and negotiation, government delegations to the 51<sup>st</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) labored to reach consensus on the *Agreed Conclusions* on this year's priority theme—***ending discrimination and violence against the girl child***. The *Agreed Conclusions* is the principal outcome document of the CSW and identifies the primary areas of concern and formulates recommendations and commitments for governments, intergovernmental bodies, and civil society actors, to be implemented at the international, national, regional, and local level. It also serves as the primary content to be included in the Commission's report to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

In its *Agreed Conclusions* the Commission on the Status of Women reaffirmed previous commitments to ensure the full implementation of the human rights of the girl child and urged governments to enact legislation on eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against girls and to put in place adequate mechanisms to monitor compliance.

Carolyn Hannan, Director of the UN Division for the Advancement of Women, called the Commission's work a step forward from the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. Meeting with NGO representatives Ms. Hannan declared, "We have put the girl child back on the global agenda."

In fact, the Commission has strengthened areas of the agenda with calls that go beyond the language in *Section L of the Beijing Platform for Action* and they have introduced a number of new items to the girls' rights agenda. For example, there is much more attention to the critical role that men and boys play in ending discrimination and violence against girls. Stereotyping while mentioned in the Beijing Platform for Action is fully treated here. The same is true of issues such as HIV/AIDS, trafficking, girls in high-risk or difficult situations, girls' right to participate.

The Commission also included discussions of the affects of poverty and migration on girls—issues absent from previous considerations of the needs and concerns of girls. Even more significantly, it included numerous calls for the empowerment of girls and their participation in decisions that affect their lives and the lives of their communities.

**Human Rights Framework**

Like the landmark *Beijing Platform for Action*, the agreed conclusions of the 51<sup>st</sup> Session of the CSW are clearly situated within a human rights framework. The Commission repeatedly reaffirmed the international commitment to ensure the full implementation of the human rights of the girl child and denounced violations of girls' rights and fundamental freedoms. In its outcome document, the Commission affirmed girls' right to reach her full potential and specifically enumerates girls' rights to education, health, protection, and participation.

In addition, the Commission calls for education about girls' rights, including strengthening rights-based awareness-raising programmes for girls and boys, parents and legal guardians, families, political, religious, traditional, and community leaders, and all professions relevant to the protection and empowerment of girls—educators, social workers, police officers, judges, lawyers, prosecutors and the media.

### **Girls' Visibility**

In its agreed conclusions, the Commission acknowledged that girls do not receive sufficient explicit attention in policy and program development and resource allocation (#10) and called on governments to, "Give explicit attention to the girl child in budget processes at all levels, including resource allocation and expenditure reviews, to ensure the mobilization of sufficient resources for the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against girls" (131).

### **Education and Training**

The 51<sup>st</sup> Session of the CSW clearly recognized the important role education, both formal and non-formal, plays in ending discrimination and violence against the girl child. In fact, the Commission dedicated 15 paragraphs of its agreed conclusions to subject. While there is little that is entirely new in the section, the document is more inclusive and more specific than the Beijing Platform for Action.

The Commission's attention to those girls most often denied access to quality education including those living in poverty (14.2d) pregnant adolescents and young mothers (14.2e) and those not enrolled in formal education because of specific life circumstances (14.2h) is to be commended.

The call to promote gender-sensitive, empowering educational and training processes and teaching materials is also to be applauded (14.2f) as is the promise to ensure girls' access to leadership training that can enable them to address the existing power differentials in society (14.2i). However, the appeal for revision of education and training programs fails to acknowledge the need for systemic reform of educational systems which still, too often, reproduce gender-based discrimination and violence.

The right to education is clearly implied throughout this section of the document. However, the right of each and every girl to quality, liberating education could have been more explicitly stated. The arguments made for increasing girls' access to education and training are almost all pragmatic and utilitarian. While it is demonstrable true that education for girls creates cascading benefits for the community, the most salient argument for increasing access to quality education for girls is simply that education is each and every girl's right.

Finally, the inclusion of a recommendation to "allocate sufficient resources" and to "monitor progress in closing the gap between girls and boys" provides some hope that these commitments will lead to action (14.2o). However, moving from promises to programs will require more specific commitments including that:

- Developing nations increase national funding to basic education and specifically target girls, especially disadvantaged and vulnerable girls;

- Donor nations demonstrate their political and financial commitment to education for girls by canceling the onerous debt of impoverished countries and increasing official development assistance for girls' education.

### **Empowerment and Participation of Girls**

The Commission recognized that the empowerment of girls is key to breaking the cycle of discrimination and violence and to promoting and protecting the full and effective enjoyment of all their human rights and so called on all relevant actors to:

- Support empowerment efforts (8);
- Promote gender-sensitive, empowering educational and training processes (14.2f);
- Promote girls' empowerment (14.3b);
- Assist girls to secure economic independence (14.13a);
- Facilitate girls' empowerment by providing opportunities for girls, to meet and interact with their peers and develop leadership capacities and networking opportunities (14.13b);
- Respect and promote the right of girls to express themselves freely and to take the views of girls into account in all matters affecting them (14.14a).

### **Measuring and Monitoring Progress**

Measuring and monitoring progress on agreed conclusions remain major concerns. Without time-bound measurable objectives, the outcome of the 51<sup>st</sup> Session of the CSW and the lofty goals set forth in its agreed conclusions will likely become yet another set of empty promises made to girls. The Commission's repeated calls to monitor progress is most welcome, however the document includes very few quantifiable targets by which to measure such progress.

In fact, the Commission itself while reaffirming past agreed commitments (3), acknowledged the failure of national governments and the international community to meet previously set goals and targets with regard to the girl child (7).

The inclusion of a commitment to mainstream attention to the girl child into "all legislations, policies and programmes and strengthen national monitoring and evaluation inter alia, by utilizing gender budgeting and gender impact assessment," (14.15a) provides some hope that governments might move from rhetoric to action.

The Commission's attention to the systematic collection of disaggregated data and to strengthening national research, monitoring, and evaluation of the progress in eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child are also most welcome (14.16a and 14.16b).

The Commission's call for the development of additional indicators to more systematically and effectively measure national progress in eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child (14.16c) as well as their call to actors in the United Nations system to pursue gender equality in their programmes and to articulate specific country-level goals and targets (18) provide some hope that the Commissions is seriously committed to actions that will lead to the elimination of all forms of violence and discrimination against girls.